

The Green Wave

The following is a translation of the first chapter of the book of the same name written in Portuguese by Monteiro Lobato of Sao Paulo, former coffee planter and now one of the best known authors and publishers in Brazil.

WHOEVER travels through the inland regions of northwest Paula will find himself seized by the marvelous spectacle of the floodtide of coffee. The green wave took birth in lands of the river bottoms. It expanded, overflowed into São Paulo and here, bordering the Mantiqueira, came to die, held up by the cold of the climate, on the bank of the Paulicéa.

But it did not stop. Transferred from the low grounds Geentian, it spread itself out in Campinas.

Here began Master Coffee to perceive that he was at home. A wanderer about the world, an exotic voyager, come from Arabia and from Africa, made trial along the road of all the black soils and sounded all the climates. Turned up his nose, however. He broke out in a smile when treading on that oasis of the Rubidio which is the West Paulo, where he pitched camp, remaining forever in his home.

There is then repeated the frontier movement of former times. It attracts the adventurous man; it is no longer the gold hidden in nuggets in the bosom of the earth, but the annual gold of the red berries which are poured into baskets.

The region was all a virgin jungle of majestic beauty. The former frontiersman rent it apart with the chopping knife and with blows of the pick; the modern frontiersman, with ax on shoulder and the firing torch in hand, now came, not to penetrate it, but to destroy it. Souls shut out from contemplativeness are never softened by the august

beauty of the jequitibás with whispering boughs like the ocean, nor by the grave bulk of the thousand-year-old perobas.

His fierce ambition preferred to the beauty of natural disorder the rows of trees that give the gold. Only this form of beauty has allurements capable of ravishing the cold soul of the Paulist. In order to see paraded before the eyes its beauty, a thing new in the world and a creation genuinely local, he overthrows, fells, and burns the marvelous green vestment of the oasis. He undoes in decades the original work which Nature had been putting together from the infancy of the earth.

Let us confess, the one spectacle is worth the other. Nothing is more superb than the sea of coffee trees in line, set up in substitution of the native forest, and nothing so much excuses the pride of the Paulist.

It is enough to swell out the chest, the impression of the one who navigates for the first time the dark green ocean,—hours at a stretch, in a pullman of the Paulist or in a car of the Mogyana, for crossing one single coffee plantation,—millions and millions of feet that undulate over the hills and valleys until lost in the horizon, confounded with the sky,—a single coffee plantation that never ends, without other breaks in the continuity than the house of the farms and the surrounding pastures. For one who needs to revitalize the withered energies and to envelop himself with indestructible faith in the future, nothing is better than a sally into the internal sea of the Rubiaceæ.

The Greed of the Tree of Gold

But the tree of the gold is produced only at the cost of the blood of the land. The red berry is luxuriant in production, but is insatiable for soil. A powder with millions of tentacles, coffee rolls over the thicket and overcomes it. Nothing satisfies it.

Already eaten up are the exuberant regions of Ribeirão Preto, Jahú, São Manuel, Araraquara, by those pieces of gold of São Paulo, and now it buries its teeth into the virgin flesh, flowing with sap, of the Paraná and of Matto Grosso.

Nothing checks the irresistible offensive. The tremendous frosts, such as in 1918, do not paralyze it; not even the imbecility of the governments, which got to the point of barring the way to it with the little circle of palisades of a prohibition of planting; neither the excessive taxes and super-taxes, nor the duties of exportation, nor the little game of Santos, nor the arrogant mentality of the cultivator. It travels constantly. Monstrous *tank*, alive but regardless, blind but instinctive, it is rolling on today, bound toward the northwest, forward, always forward.

The coffee is an epopee. When our literature lets go the weak tea which it sips in the Alvear, and understands its true mission, the epopee, the tragedy, the comedy, of the coffee will be the great themes of all who feel in themselves the divine spark. Today, pitiful, it is so much entertained with its 5 o'clock tea, with the buzzings around the skirts of hysterical girls, with the ribbon of the pillow cases, with the mercurial superficialities which the French export to us, that it is even well not to set to work to rend the great theme with hands of an ape.

What repose is necessary, what amplitude of vision, what firmness of soul, what superhuman courage, in order to see, feel, and relate the history of the Green Wave which digests the virgin

forests!—the former aspects,—the long train of negroes enlivened by the cowhide,—and the modern aspects,—the hardness of the Italian, colored with the oxid of iron; the hosts from the inland, the stoutest of Brazil, who descend in winter from the great subterranean habitations of Bahia, with ax at the side and the fury of destruction in the muscles; the duel between those heroes with sharp teeth, the knife, and the wild forest,—the ax that sings in the roseate wood of the perobas.

The way opened is traced by the waste of vegetation; afterward the burning; and then the inland inhabitant that returns at his will, with the money in his handkerchief, paid, paid and repaid, for the work by the dazzling spectacle of the conflagration which carries the impression on the retina forever.

They destroy, but do not know how to build up. There enters on the scene for building the farmer, and commences the drama of the formation,—four years of mattock in the hand, of patient running after a thicket which "runs after the people." Victory at last, the snowy flowering—if it be not, as in 1918, a premature flowering of snow!

The Impenetrable Past

The subject carries one away. Let us go back. The penetration of the coffee into new lands writes extremely curious chapters, swaying between the tragic and the comic. It makes for good or for evil—almost always for evil.

The first step is the creation of a property with a clear title. Without this basis, the plantation cannot arise, which is an enterprise of bulk, where large capital is engaged. The property is created today, as in former times, by the conquest of the strongest, by spoliation carried out by the most audacious, by those most free from scruples.

The man timid and perfectly moral arrives at the inland and does not encounter a breach in which to set his foot; finds it a desert, but seized upon. He does not see people, but runs against owners. If he wishes to buy, no one will sell to him; no one will rent to him; no one will lease to him. The holders, jealous of a traditional possession from fathers to sons, do not want neighbors that may disturb the peace of the expanses. The moral man turns back, discouraged.

*The Coming of the Grillo**

But the grilleiro bobs up, and everything is transformed,—lands tied up, lands insurmountable for cultivation, which old long-beards block against the thousands of bushels, in order to derive from them a plate of beans and some pigs from swill, as it has been coming down thus from grandfather to grandchild, and would remain that way the whole life; fallow lands which the inertia of the State keeps unoccupied, without knowing for what nor why; lands legitimately, legally, open to ownership,—nothing of this is an obstacle for the astuteness of the grilleiro.

In setting out for the interior, he leaves at home, in the drawer, scruples of conscience. He comes resolved, he comes "ready made," like a sparrowhawk. He put at work the best tricks, forges signatures, papers, seals; falsifies rivers and mountains; falsifies trees and landmarks; falsifies judge's and notary's records; falsifies the needle of the balance of Themis; falsifies the sky, the earth, the water; falsifies God and the devil. But he conquers. And by the skill of that first work of falsification,

*One acquiring and holding land under a spurious title.

despoiling the possessors or owners, secure in the pick-lock of the law, the grilleiros expel from the lands, in a stupendous abortion, all the fossils that would live there parasitically, attempting to resist the push of civilization.

The tracts being divided up into lots, the grilleiros sell them to the legion of planters that follow them like the carrion bird, by the smell of the carnage. And the grillo, if he was well made, is intractable and provokes admiration; if badly made, goes to pieces and is hissed by those he invaded.

In a somnolent inland district, when, in the presence of a lawyer or surveyor, the old dwellers awaken, they murmur with one voice, and, if they do not murmur, they feel it there in the interior of the bowels, Our time is up.

And it ends in fact. The marasmus of the land ends, because the grilleiro is the precursor of the Green Wave. His "cri-cri" announces the approach of the *tank*. Five, 10, years afterward, the blossom of the coffee whitens the region and incorporates it into the patrimony of the national wealth.

The rare genius of Assis Chateaubriand already explained in general outlines, but incisive, this social and civilizing function of the grillo. He defined it as the art of extract right from nothing. That is it. It is the victory of the false key of the strongest. But he is a pick-lock. He opens the doors of the interior, but it is a false key! It states a moral. The coffee replies, "My hunger is above the moral, and I alone know the laws of my appetite."

There are sympathetic hungers—no doubt of that!